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How did you adjust to becoming a new school psychologist during the COVID-19 pandemic? What contributed to your success?

My internship year was cut short with the first round of lockdowns, which forced me to quickly pivot and utilize the technology that was available. I took advantage of the extra time at home to participate in as many online trainings as possible, lean into the experience and advice of my mentors/supervisors, and discover virtual platforms to stay connected with students. Once I was working as an independent psychologist, I continued to use the knowledge of the school psychology team in my district. I met regularly with my team to coordinate student supports and align our goals to keep students engaged even throughout the changing school schedule.

How have you gotten involved with MTSS implementation in your schools? What recommendations do you have for other school psychologists who want to help improve MTSS implementation in their settings?
My first year out of graduate school I joined a team working on the Trauma-Informed Multi-tiered Systems of Support (TIMS) Grant, which enabled me to engage in the MTSS implementation process in my district. The collaborative training grant was written to connect Indiana University and Richland-Bean Blossom schools to increase the school psychology presence in the district, improve student functioning (mental health, achievement, and discipline), and improve the district’s knowledge of trauma-informed practices. Working for a grant-based team, I am able to fully engage in developing and expanding the MTSS implementation in my schools. As a new psychologist, I learned the key to improving any system in a school is to first build relationships with your colleagues and learn as much as possible about the systems that are already in place. Change can be uncomfortable and impossible if you are not working as a team, so continually connecting with key team members and moving towards a mutually agreed upon plan is crucial. Additionally, having each colleague work within their area of strength can help the MTSS implementation be more efficient and beneficial to students. Once new systems are in place, data collection is an essential component to analyzing the effectiveness and fidelity of the MTSS implementation process. MTSS implementation continues to improve as research and school communities change, so it is important for the MTSS leadership team to make adjustments as the systems evolve.

Tell us more about your role. What is it like to wear many hats as a school psychologist? What are keys to your success with this?

My role under the TIMS grant allows me to experience many facets of school psychology. I provide direct social, emotional, and behavioral interventions to students both in individual and group settings, provide crisis support for behavioral and mental health needs, directly collaborate and consult with teachers, work within a systems approach to plan for the schoolwide and districtwide MTSS implementation, and conduct special education evaluations. My schedule looks different each day, which provides for a challenging but rewarding experience. I use research and look to my mentors to help develop skills and systems in all these areas. As an early career psychologist, I have learned that trust-based relationships with colleagues, students, and parents is necessary prior to making any progress towards a goal, especially when working to support a community with a trauma-informed focus. Another key to being successful is using technology to keep my schedule efficient and to organize my intervention materials and data.
What specific aspects of NASP membership have benefited you in your career thus far? Why is membership in NASP important to you?

While the grant I work under is focused on increasing the presence of school psychologists in my district, it can still be a lonely field at times. In a district of hundreds of employees, there are a handful of individuals who truly understand my perspective as a psychologist. NASP membership has allowed me to connect with other individuals who share a similar vision and focus. I regularly look to the online forums to get updated information on the field and current research to help improve my skills and knowledge. I particularly utilize the online resources and handouts to share with colleagues and parents on specialized topics. Lastly, I can't leave out the conferences, whether they are in person or virtual; I enjoy the opportunity to connect with like-minded peers and grow in my knowledge of the field.